The Washington Herald Magazine of Features and Fiction

OPEN COURT LETTERS FROM HERALD READERS SHOW TRENDS OF OPINION

Poor Boys in Law.

To the Editor, The Washington Herald:

Your editorial, entitled "Raising the Bars," which appeared in the issue of September 1, should be read by every American in the country. I, for one, am glad to learn that in our national city there is at least one editor broadminded and courageous enough to "speak out in open meeting" in behalf of the poor boys of the nation.

Hard work is the main stock in trade of the poor boy of this country and if, by the sweat of his brow and the burning of midnight oil, he masters the principles of the law sufficiently to pass the bar examination of his home State, which, by the way, should be the sole test of his fitness I fail to see whose business it is whether he acquires a college education or not.

People whom a college education has benefitted realize that they do not know so much, after all, and are certainly the last to insist that a man cannot make good in this country because he has not been measured with the same yard-stick of "higher learning."

L. F. SUMMERALL.

Page Uncle Toby.

To the Editor, The Washington Herald:

Apropos of the recent discussion in the "Open Court" of the Soul, Spirit, Hell, Future Life, etc., I would like to know what your readers, who appear to be well-read on many subjects, think of the devil. Is he personal? Is he omnipresent? What are his chief characteristics? Does he not attend strictly to his own business, move in the best society, and never intrude himself where he is not wanted?

The Rev. "Billy" Sunday, at the close of his $100,000 campaign in Washington a few years ago, told his large audiences that "the devil will take a long vacation from Washington at the close of this meeting." Does the increased attendance at church services, or the lessened activities of the police courts verify the statement?

Further, if the devil be put out of business, who would do the work assigned to that part of the universe? If there is a hell for the punishment of the sinner, somebody must be in charge to replenish the brimstone and wield the pitchfork; and from his long experience and general efficiency, the present devil merits a continuation in office even if there is a necessity to reduce the force in other departments. Come now, let us reason together.

F. M. OTTINGER.

Cruelty to Animals.

To the Editor, The Washington Herald:

In practically every large city there is a branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and this city is no exception, and yet one constantly sees much cruelty to and neglect of our dumb friends. It is the writer's understanding that the S. P. C. A. has among its members many of the wealthy of the land and that it is well supported financially. My personal experience has been that when I have written to the S. P. C. A. regarding certain conditions existing in the city I was living in at the time I wrote, my letter would not receive the courtesy of an acknowledgment and the conditions to which I called attention, remained unchanged, but this spirit is often prevalent when help is paid to do humanitarian work.

A few weeks ago in Washington there was a parade on Pennsylvania avenue, the object of which was to enlist the sympathies of the people in our dumb friends and to influence us all to give more time and attention to the care of same. I am, therefore, constrained to bring to the attention of your readers the pitiful plight of the humble hens that we see huddled in crates outside many of the grocery stores in this city. True, they are awaiting execution, but must they be tortured in the interim? The hen is accustomed to anything but a cage; it likes to flap its wings and scratch for food. These poor creatures are penned up for hours at a time in a box so small that they can scarcely move, no care being taken to even remove the box into a shady spot away from the glare of the baking sun, and in many cases with no water near with which to moisten their parched throats. When water is given to them it becomes warm, and dirty and is so far removed that it is almost impossible for the hens to reach it through the narrow bars of their cages.

It should be made imperative that a portion of at least one bar be removed to enable the hen to reach its head out easily to drink of the water standing in a receptacle and that said water be changed several times a day; also that the fowl should be fed until disposed of by sale. Now, if the S. P. C. A. is incapable of changing these conditions, why do not the persons in various neighborhoods interest themselves in same and put an end to this cruelty? I should also like to suggest that if anyone is found carrying a hen with its head down, said person should be made liable to arrest and a fine. I believe if the policemen on the various beats were to interest themselves in the above matters, much of this unnecessary cruelty could be put an end to.

May I further ask, by way of information, if it is lawful for live fish and other sea food to be kept in ice? Scientists tell us that fish have only a slight sensation of pain. Do they know this to be a fact? We know that to hold a piece of ice in our hands but a few moments causes the most exquisite suffering from contact with the cold. Could not a law be passed to compel vendors of sea produce to keep same in their natural environment until they are required for food. Does not this come within the jurisdiction of the S. P. C. A. also?

I have read certain publications of the S. P. C. A. enumerating the work that has been done by same, but while no doubt much has been done, there is still much to do, and it is often the small things that count. In New York City and in other cities in winter almost any day in the section of the wharfs you will see horse after horse straining every muscle in an endeavor to pull a load that would be heavy for two such animals, the ground slippery, the drivers beating the poor creatures that are trying so faithfully to do their best, finally some auto driver having to give a push from behind to give the wagon a start—and yet there are no S. P. C. A. representatives there to protest. Surely this wealthy society could well afford to keep representatives in several such sections of all large cities.

MARION WELSH.

Washington, D. C.

Sees God in the Clouds.

To the Editor, The Washington Herald:

And who can tell when doctors disagree? Mr. Editor, will you kindly allow me to waste some more perfectly good paper with another "very crude" spiel on the subject, the soul? This is my first offense. However, there is being written so much bunk and surplus tommy-rot, that I see no good reason for not contributing my share of same.

Now, Mr. Snakehunter, or Snake Charmer, whoever you are, there is an essence of sense in your article, and, in my humble opinion, such is entirely lacking in the "scholarly and erudite" masterpieces of your critics. So take courage. You have at least one follower. You can go like Gulliver to the horse for sense and let these high-browed doctors of theology bask on the flying Isle of Laputa, with one of their eyes cocked to the zenith and the other toward their corpulent waist lines and with F street flappers to wake them up at feeding time.

I am a poor Indian, who sees God in the clouds, in the great firmament, and in the beakers and test tubes of my laboratory. If I depended upon theologians to convince me of an infinite God, if I took seriously one-tenth of 1 per cent of what they say, then to my mind, or soul or spirit (if I have any), there could be no God.

As to the soul. When all the arguments are finished and the youngest critic has fried, and if it pleases God, why, maybe, we shall know all about it. Somebody said: "An honest man is the noblest work of God." Aye, so is he, and the scarcest, too. Show me a few and I will quit my skepticism and go back to church.

Churchanity doesn't attract me. Christianity could, but I have never seen any of the latter. What is personality? Is it the soul, the mind, or is it the spirit? We have phrenologists and psychoanalysts, who by observing the various bumps on our domes of thought can tell us all about ourselves. Does the soul give us these bumps?

How do you differentiate between the soul of an intelligent man, like Edison, and the soul of an ignoramus who never thinks for himself and who is just as likely to be a gypsy as a Baptist preacher, the choice depending on which of the two phases of civilization first influences him?

What is common sense? Is it an attribute of the soul? Is it at any rate, the rarest of all God's given gifts to man? Has a dog or a rattlesnake a soul? When a dog comes to me, wagging his tail, I know that he is sincere in his manifestations of friendship, but men meet, shake hands, flatter and palaver and then proceed in a most refined manner to cut one another's throats. And a rattlesnake, why he is at least gentleman enough to warn you before he spills his poison.

Are such natural attributes as backbone, patriotism, perseverence and willpower, are they of the soul, or minds, or are they of the spleen? Has a slacker with a yellow streak a yard wide, a soul? Have gossips, scandalmongers, character assassins?

But why waste time in trying to convince anyone that your own ideas are the only right ones. Why not chuck this futile controversy about souls and make this page one from which we can gain some real facts and information?

L. A. PALMER.

Washington, D. C.

The Pushcart Pedlers.

To the Editor, The Washington Herald:

Here's hoping the pushcart vendors win out in their fight against the enforcement of the ordinance which serves, not the public, but the competitors of the men behind the carts. You have not heard any complaint from the public, have you? Some of the merchants are quoted as saying that the peddlers block the way to their stires. Everyone in Washington knows that the greatest obstacle is the difference in prices.

We are not quite sure that we need the pushcart men at all, though they do give us good goods at lower prices. Perhaps there are better possible means of distribution. Neither are we quite sure but that we should be just as happy and prosperous with just half as many "business men." The other half might try producing something for a change, then we would not have so many unproductive consumers. But if the peddlers are allowed on the streets at all, it is sheer persecution to compel them to keep on the move. Lastly, had you thought that a cart in motion is a much greater obstruction to traffic? Who wants Tony to "move on?"

E. C. HELM.

Mount Ranier, Md.

Pellagra Scare.

To the Editor, The Washington Herald:

The recent pelagra scare, which was not justified by the facts, does the South a gross injustice. The probable cause of this misrepresentation of the South is the enthusiasm of Dr. Goldberger, an officer in the United States Public Health Service, who is obsessed with the idea that a diet of "corn bread, syrup and bacon" is the sole cause of pellagra.

Goldberger reasoned that with the low price of cotton the people of the South would have to exist on this diet, and therefore there must be an increase of pellagra. He evidently does not know that the farmers of the South have raised more food crops than before the war.

The majority of physicians who have had most experience with the disease do not accept Goldberger's theory. It is undoubtedly true that the poorly nourished individual is susceptible to pellagra, just as he is to tuberculosis, and that an unbalanced diet is a predisposing cause of the disease—as it is to many other diseases—but most of us feel that the cause of pellagra is an infection of some kind yet to be discovered.

SEALE HARRIS.

Secretary-editor, Southern Medical Association.

Honor to Flag.

To the Editor, The Washington Herald:

Your editorial this morning on "The Flag" deserves some comment, in my opinion, in the Open Court.

You fail to understand why along the line of march nobody stood at attention, bared their head, or shouted out their love for the flag. By the way, what do you mean by the official flag? I had supposed until awakened this morning by your editorial that any flag with thirteen alternate red and white stripes with forty-eight stars on a blue field was official enough for anybody. But now it seems that only when carried at the head of a column with band music does it become official.

The shouting, noisy, saluting man is not always the patriot. It seems to me that a quiet respect for our country is far better than the wild acclaim whenever and wherever the flag is shown. You want to return to the conditions when the war was on in this flag business. I, for one, do not. In those alleged patriotic days any cheap act on any cheap stage could get a great round of applause by displaying the flag. It was enough to make an American sick. Any coarse man who was in the habit of making speeches in those days used to wrap himself in the flag for want of something to say; not that there wasn't something to say, but he was unable to say it, hence his recourse to the flag.

No, respect is here in plenty for the flag. Americans simply, now relieved of war hysteria, show their respect in a milder and far more wholesome manner.

There is nothing especially holy about the flag; it is only as good as the country behind it.

Respectfully,

BRUCE DOUGLAS.

THE CYCLONE

By Rose L. Ellerbe

[Continued from preceding page.]

take her back with ye now? Is she afraid o' bein' a poor man's wife?"

"It's me that's afraid—not her," Lon acknowledged. "She was ready to go, first off. She's offering to go now. But, I ain't ready for her, yet."

"Mebbe ye're right—mebbe ye won't have so much to regret—" Sam Baxter's voice was unsteady. "But—it's a mighty hard thing to know when we are ready to live."

"I don't guess I'll have any trouble telling when I'm ready," Lon stated fervently, still blind to the wisdom of age. "Only—I'm not going into debt for it."

And though Edna, once more putting reserve aside, urged, pleaded even, that she was ready to go back with him, he refused to listen, and left her with a renewed promise. "I'll have the house done and ready for you by New Year's."

Another spring was come and Lon, with high hopes in his heart, again walked step by step, hour after hour, day succeeding day, week in and week out, over his fields, ploughing, harrowing, seeding—going through all the infinite motions, performed with blind faith in forces beyond human control, that makes up the gigantic game called farming.

Again he saw the gentle mist of green creeping over black loam; the delicate curling fingers of corn reaching upward; the ethereal blueness of flax blossoms, bending and blending in the breeze. And later on, he saw the sun rise higher and higher, shining each day with a pitiless heat from a cloudless sky. He kept the plough going while the parched soil burned his soles and clouds of dust choked his lungs. But the dry winds and the blazing sun seared and yellowed the writhing grain, the half-grown corn blades wilted, and the flax stalks became dry straw.

Lon watched it all, at times with a heavy, dead feeling of despair, and again in a blaze of resentment. "It's tough," he cried out to Jim Prosser, "it's damned tough—after all the rest! And there's my well—water without end—you know how it nearly got away with me before I could get the curb in. If I——"

"Yes," Prosser nodded, "that's it. We must have irrigation in this country. There is plenty of water underground—we've got to get it on top, where we can use it when we need it. But you can't do anything this year. We'll just have to lose this crop."

"I wonder——" Lon began. With a sudden desperate hope he set himself to rigging up a crude flume and opening up furrows. Then he began pumping water by hand on to his cornfield. The greedy sun and thirsty soil snatched up the little streams almost before they reached the field. After pumping steadily for two days to put a flow through two furrows he decided: "I'll pump at night—the sun won't eat it up so fast then."

"It's no use, Lon," Prosser objected. "You can't beat the drought this year. But we'll go at the thing right and be ready for next dry spell."

"I can't wait, man," Lon burst out; "I've got to have a crop, or at least part of a crop, this year!"

Despite the protests of his friends he started in to pump at sunset. Hour after hour he stood, steadily moving the pump handle up and down, with a dogged persistence from which all spring of youth and faith had been drained. He kept on pumping until it seemed as though his very heart would be torn out by the strain. Prosser, Lane, and other neighbors came to watch, to offer to spell him, to admonish and to ridicule; but Lon kept on pumping, first with one hand, then the other, until at moonset he crept away with bleeding hands and sore muscles for a few hours of exhausted sleep.

He succeeded in saving a portion of his corn before he sank down one night, unknowing, uncaring. The cool of morning air brought him to consciousness of racking pains and burning flesh. He managed to [illegible]

Prosser found him tossing with fever. For three weeks he lay helpless with a low fever that left him weak and despondent. But through it all he would not permit the Prossers to write to his father or Edna. Molly rebelliously asserted that she would take the responsibility on her own shoulders, and wrote Edna a long letter. But her husband refused to mail it without Lon's consent.

"But he's too sick to know what he [illegible]" Molly scolded. "He's weak as a baby in mind as well as in body!"

"Forget it!" Jim [illegible]. "Lon [illegible] may be as wobbly as a kitten on his legs, but his head is all right. He knows what's what—talks irrigation plant all the time."

And still no rain came. Lon was up and about. As he saw months of hard labor—for man and for beast—turned into useless wisps of straw and all his carefuly matured plans changed into idle dreams the subtle hardening of character and softening of judgment that turns the boy into the man went on within him.

It was the man who sat down one Sunday afternoon before the rough board table of his shack and wrote:

"I made a big mistake when I picked out my homestead. It seems there is liable to be one dry year out of three in this section of the country. I'll have to put in a windmill and an irrigation plant before I can build the house. I can't ask you to wait any longer, Edna. I s'pose your father was right—I hadn't ought to have asked you to marry me. And you ought to have said 'no,' first off. So, dear girl, you are free. Try to forget me, and forgive me for taking so much out of your life—you know how it has been with me——"

He sent the letter and, as he picked his stunted corn, he brooded despairingly over his failure. When Prosser shouted:

"Here, old man! Your girl hasn't forgotten you—it's a fat one!" He took the envelope in a hand that shook.

Alone, he read: "Unless you made a mistake in picking me out, too, Lon, we will keep on waiting together—if you insist on waiting."

In spite of her loyalty he looked ahead that dismal winter with determination rather than the confidence that had carried him forward thus far. The firm conviction and the courage that had counted each hindrance simply as a delay almost went out of him.

"Perhaps I have been wrong from the start—maybe I'd ought to have borrowed the money and married Edna that first year," he ruminated. "I might not have made such a flat failure that way, though everything was against me."

He had taken out his final papers now and could easily place a mortgage on his land. Edna, knowing this, wrote:

"The way is open, now, Lon. By borrowing $500 you can build a house that will be plenty good to start with, and I am sure I can save you $500 in a year or two. It's business, dear. Everybody borrows in order to make. I know how you feel—but be reasonable."

Yet, though Lon acknowledged that he was unreasonable; though he knew in his own soul that his fear was cowardly; though he felt that his desire for happiness matched Edna's own; the dread of debt had become so ingrained and the obstinacy bred of the long struggle was so unyielding that he could not bring himself to act upon her counsel.

There was a difference after that. No complaints, no reproaches appeared in Edna's letters; but there was less of the cheerful expectation and of details of her daily living. And Lon, toiling winter and summer now, from day-wake to the last streak of light, was too engrossed in his fight to give much heed to anything not present and tangible. Sometimes weeks elapsed between their letters.

A new year's crop was promising well. If the harvest, threshing, and marketing all went through without disaster Lon would be [illegible] the next dry season. It was now harvest time. By exchanging work with Prosser and Lane, Baxter had their aid in cutting and stacking his wheat. He was driving the mowing machine one scorching August forenoon. As he looked back over the even rifts of straw he was thinking:

"If nothing happens I'll come out ahead at last this season. Edna'll be glad."

And then he began to think. When had Edna's last letter come? "Why," in sudden realization, "that letter was before haying! She hasn't answered my last letter—it wasn't really worth answering—just a note. I—maybe she's got tired at last. I couldn't blame her."

He drove on, conscious now of the heat, the dust, the sting of chaff and perspiration. What was the use of all this grinding work if it were not for Edna?" He tried to think of life without Edna—what would happen if she had really changed her mind? At last he could stand this new fear no longer. He was ahead of the rake. He left his team standing and went to the house. He found her last letter and read it over. It was brief. It answered none of the questions in his mind.

"Edna, darling," he wrote, "it's a long time since your last letter; you haven't answered my last note. I know you can't be sick or my father would let me know. I am afraid—maybe you have made up your mind not to wait any longer. I couldn't blame you for that. I know I haven't done right—keeping you waiting for me so long. And I haven't even written to you like I ought. Somehow I couldn't tell you how hard things were. Sometimes it has seemed as if it was no use. I'd have to give up and go back to hiring out. It looks like a fair yield this year, and then—but I don't dare make any more promises, I have broken so many—I want you to be happy, Edna. More than anything else I want that. If you have found some other man that can make you happier than I can I won't say a word. Only, I shall always love you—I'll try to stand it—but I can't think about it."

That night, when the last chore was done, Lon Baxter started for the nearest post-office, nine miles away. He would not put this added burden on his faithful horses. Wearily he plodded on, through soft darkness, thinking messages of love and longing which he had not put on the paper—perhaps they reached Edna's heart just the same.

The long years of her waiting had not been easy for Edna. Her father had never ceased his reviling of Lon and ugly comments upon her foolishness. As time went on his anger became constant and harassing. At first Edna, living in her own world of happy dreams, heard him indifferently. She spent her spare hours in preparing against her bridal days the dainty things no real girl will give up. She pieced quilts, sewed carpet rags, she saved feathers for her pillows and bed; with her mother's aid she accumulated bed and table linen. Gradually her trunk and box were filled to overflowing.

After the third year her father insisted that he would have no more of this nonsense. "Here's Lem Randall ready to marry ye at the word. He's got 320 acres as good land as there is in the state of Ioway, and I'll give him another quarter when you are married. You take him and git into a home of your own, I tell you."

"Lem thinks a lot more about that quarter section of land than he does about me," Edna retorted. "You can give him the land if you want to, but I'm not a prize package to go with it."

He swore at her. "Why ain't you sensible like Milly and Grace? Look at Milly. Ed Beeson has just bought a new farm—that makes him a hull section—nigh all clear. He'll be a rich man before many years."

"Yes. And look at Milly! What good does his land do her? He won't even buy her a washing machine. She's an old woman at thirty-three." Edna responded with spirit.

"And what do you think you'll be, slav- [illegible]

"Lon will never be as mean to me as Ed is to sister. He will never let me milk ten cows."

In the strength of her sure love and hope it had been easy to defend her lover and herself. Her father's most savage attacks, the sneers of her sisters, the questioning or pitying glances of her girl friends, all passed her by. But as the years slipped away it was only the deep, strong current of her love and the steadfastness of her nature that held Edna up under the hardness of her life.

Goodrich, when he found that Edna would not consider Randall, nor accept the attentions of other men tentatively offered, declared: "Well, if you think I am going to keep on supporting you in idleness until Lon Baxter can make enough to feed two mouths ye're mistaken. Hatty can go and you can do her work."

"But, pa," Mrs. Goodrich pleaded anxiously," it takes all three of us to feed and clean after four men, and take care o' the milk, and the chickens, and the garden, to say nothin' 'bout feedin' pigs and calves. We all o' us—Edna does mor'n her share by rights now—we all o' us work hard the better part o' fourteen hours a day."

Yet, though "Ma Goodrich," by her weight and her rheumatism, and her long years of service, was entitled to relief rather than new burdens, her husband carried out his threat. Hetty, who had "helped" since Edna was a child, was dismissed. Mother and daughter were compelled to the drudgery that eats the vitality out of the most robust body and the most hopeful soul.

Lon had no suspicion of what life had come to be to the overburdened and much harried girl. She had been pretty and popular, had sung in the choir of the Baptist church, and been counted in for all merrymakings. He thought of her still as the village belle, before whom he had trembled. He was still wondering how she had ever come to favor the big, awkward lout he felt himself to be.

In her own heart of late Edna had found herself fearing that Lon had changed—that he no longer wanted her. It was in despair that she had determined not to answer his last hurried note. She would put him to this test: if he did not speak she would admit that it had all been a blunder and try to gather up her life and make something of what was left, after she had torn her one love out of her heart. Day after day passed with no letter. It was the feverish, hurrying time of harvest and she had few spare moments—nor had Lon, she told herself. Yet, with slowly dying faith, she waited and feared and tried to hope.

One night her father, with a contemptuous snort, tossed her a letter he had brought from town. "'Pears like your man ain't in no hurry about writin' these days," he observed, acidly.

She made no answer. She waited until she was in her own room, at the end of a scoring day's work. Her lips were white as she slipped the sheet from the envelope and read the words that had come from Lon's heart.

She read the letter over again with quickly responding spirit. But the sparkle and glow of love's first happy hours had been sorely dimmed by toil and disappointment.

Once more, with a new season, the resurrecting force of spring pulsed in Lon's veins. The man who drops seed into freshly stirred depth of Mother Earth cannot help counting on the harvest, however often or bitterly she has flouted him. This year the winds were gentle, rain came at the right moment, the sun was tempered. The yield was so abundant that the one railroad could not move trains fast enough.

That fall Lon Baxter bought and hauled lumber. Through the winter, with his own hands, he built his house.

The home for Edna was ready.

Lon rolled a window shade back and forth with a touch of pride as he remembered the green paper shades manipulated by a string and always tipping one way or the other [illegible] childhood. He settled his overcoat on his broad shoulders and sent a last appraising look about the room. It was square—and bare; a door and window to the east, a double window to the south, through which the April sunshine flooded, gilding the yellow paint of the floor. The open "butt'ry" door showed clean pine shelves, the new cook stove shone with nickel and mica. The big, black wood rocker, which had been the one luxury of his dugout, stood near a small cane seated rocker. Edna would sit here to sew, or perhaps—by and by—she might rock and sing lullabys. He laid a caressing hand on it at the thought.

He looked into the tiny bedroom—its walls covered with the cheapest of paper—a trailing vine pattern, with pink and blue flowers. Somehow that had seemed to belong to Edna. The bedstead and the dresser were of the shiniest—they had given up the wedding at home to pay for that "suite."

"It'll look scruptious when she gets her little grim-cracks around," he told himself with a smile. As he moved toward the back door he spoke out loud:

"It's convenient and comfortable——" he glanced around once more, "and she'll make it beautiful! And it's all paid for—there ain't any mortgage, or debt, thank God!"

His thanksgiving was so devout that he took off his cap and paused, a somber light in the steady eyes.

"She shan't never work herself to death the way mother did," he was thinking. "It's been hard—all-fired hard for both of us, waiting so long—five years! But I'm glad I stuck it out. Now we are beginning right, anyway." At this moment he was surer than ever of that.

The fixity of the frozen plains was in the sturdy form and strongly blocked face of the man, as he jogged over the half-thawed road. Yet his thoughts were leaping forward tumultuously. Tomorrow, Edna would step from the train to his arms! Tomorrow, Edna would be his wife! Tomorrow, she would come to the house he had built for her! In this hour, the past—that had so long and painfully prepared—or hindered—the way for tomorrow, counted for nothing. Tomorrow, for the first time, he would begin to live.

It was three o'clock the next afternoon before Lon and his bride left the Prewitts and started home, her trunk, sewing machine and big box in the wagon behind the seat. As the scattering houses of the village were left behind, Lon put his arm about Edna and searched her eyes.

"At last!" His voice shook with the marvel of it, "Oh, Edna!"

"Yes. We are on the way home, at last," she whispered, her eye-lids drooping, to hide tears of joy and of sadness.

In this moment, the culmination of so many postponements, of such scathing delays, they had not many words to say. They rode on in silence, while flocks of silver-flecked clouds sent shadows chasing across the wide naked prairie. To the westward, a black drift hung on the horizon. Once Lon remarked that it looked like rain.

"If it waits till we get home, we'll not care—let it rain," Edna's laugh rippled with new happiness as he laughed with her. Suddenly she lifted her head from his shoulder to glance about and cry, "Why Lon, I didn't know there was a railroad near here!"

"There isn't." Then he, too, caught the roar and rumbling of a mighty train. He turned quickly. From the west a dense, black cloud was sweeping toward them with the speed and the scream of a demon train.

"Yes, it's a cyclone," he answered Edna's gasping word, while he used both hands to hold his plunging team. He turned again toward the hurtling mass whose ravening breath was already brushing their faces.

"Get out and lie flat on the ground," he directed. Before she could obey, the cloud veered and roared away to the northeast.

"It's gone over," his voice was wavery.

"Is it going toward home?" she questioned anxiously.

[illegible] "But a vagrant twister like that never does any harm. It'll hit the ground somewhere, or peter out in thin air."

Lon drove more rapidly after this. He pointed out the Prossers' house as they passed—a dim light within.

"I must go and see Molly soon," Edna said. "I feel as if I knew her already—and the baby, too."

At last the team swung into a swifter trot of their own accord. "We are almost there." Baxter spoke tensely. He had felt all the time that he should not be sure this was his own Edna—the woman of his hopes and desire—until she had crossed the threshold of their home, until he had heard her first words of understanding and appreciation.

Edna, looking ahead eagerly through veiling twilight, made out the bulk of the barn. Then Lon drew up the horses so sharply that she was almost pitched out of her seat. Dropping the reins, with an inarticulate sound that made her heart stop beating, he leaped from the wagon and ran on ahead. After a confused, frightened moment, she climbed down and ran after him. She stumbled over a board; her feet tripped on scattered brick.

She stopped beside her husband, before a jumbled heap, above which a wavering, broken column was silhouetted against the sky.

"Oh, Lon," she breathed, "the house—where is it?"

"There!" He thrust out a clenched fist. "There! The cyclone—the cyclone—the house is gone! Our home is gone!" The words were jerked out mechanically, from an upheaval too deep for expression.

They stood together before the ruins of their house, stunned, frozen by the catastrophe. At last Lon spoke again:

"It is the Hand o' God. The Hand o' God has struck us, like it did my folks! Five years—gone—it's the end!" Despair, cold, blank despair had shut down upon his soul.

Edna did not speak. All the strain, all the dullness, all the suffering of the years seemed lumped upon her heart. In that moment the last trace of sweet girlishness died in her face. But—she was here, beside her man. His salvation was in her hands. The rich womanhood of the pioneer mothers of our race blossomed into fullness.

"No, Lon," she spoke quietly and she reached up and laid protecting arms about his stiffened shoulders. "No, dear, it is not the end! It is only the beginning—the right beginning—together."

A sob tore up through the man's body. He dropped his head to her breast. He gave himself to the comfort of her touch, of her lips, as they murmured broken words of love, as they kissed his tear-wet cheeks. "That's right," he whispered hoarsely. "That's right! I have been wrong all the time. Edna! Oh, Edna, can you ever forgive me?"

Presently, in the humility of one who has been chastened into recognition of his own finiteness, he went on:

"Tomorrow I will go to the bank and ask for a loan—enough to build another house."

"No, you won't, Lon!" Edna slipped a hand into his and drew him away from the wreck, across the rough ground, until they reached a dimly outlined block at the rear. They passed before the blackness that marked an open door, and Edna finished:

"We will not mortgage our place now, Lon. I've always wanted to live in this dugout, you know. And now I'm going to have my wish. We will just be contented here together until you get another crop and can build again."

Lon Baxter straightened up. The revulsion came:

"And that will be this year!" he cried, the strength and courage of youth and love which Fate cannot conquer, thrilling through the words.

"Working together—like we ought to have been doing all the time—we'll beat this god damned country yet! We'll build another house next fall, sure!"